



# ANNUAL REPORT

## Bighorn National Forest

*Fiscal year 2014*



The Bighorn National Forest exemplifies multiple use management. In addition to a wide range of recreation opportunities and abundant wildlife populations, the Bighorn hosts activities such as grazing and logging, all of which help support the economies of local communities.

The Bighorn Mountains are a sister range of the Rocky Mountains. Located in north-central Wyoming halfway between Mount Rushmore and Yellowstone National Park, the Bighorns are a vacation destination in themselves. No region in Wyoming provides a more diverse landscape: lush grasslands and alpine meadows, crystal-clear lakes and glacially-carved valleys, rolling hills and sheer mountain walls. With 34 campgrounds, 10 picnic areas, three scenic byways, abundant streams, 1,500 miles of trails, and the 189,000-acre Cloud Peak Wilderness, the Bighorn offers something for everyone.

### A LITTLE HISTORY

The Bighorn National Forest was set aside in 1897.

It is named for the Bighorn River, which flows along the west side of the forest and whose headwaters arise within the national forest boundary. The river was first named by American Indians for the great herds of bighorn sheep at the river's mouth. Lewis and Clark transferred the name to the mountain range in the early 1800s.

Humans have inhabited the Bighorns for thousands of years. Indigenous people used the area for traditional cultural practices and subsistence living. Mountain men hunted, trapped, and traded on these lands.

Historical uses resonate today in the rich culture of the area, including ranching, logging, and professional outfitters and guides. Lodges and resorts provide fishing, hunting, and recreation services to the public.



# A message from the Forest Supervisor

I am proud to present the 2014 accomplishments of the Bighorn National Forest.

As stewards of these public lands, the employees of the Bighorn National Forest are dedicated to caring for the land and delivering a variety of goods and services to the American people.

As we look ahead to 2015 and beyond, a number of challenges face the Bighorn. As budgets continue to decrease, we will have to prioritize our work and likely will not be able to accomplish everything we have in the past.

We will do our best to be more efficient and continue the strong community relationships to sustain the forest's resources.

This report is for you, the owners of this spectacular landscape. I hope you find it informative and useful.

*Bill Bass*



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## We're always interested . . .

. . . in your thoughts and concerns about the Bighorn's programs and activities, so feel free to stop by, give us a call, or send an email to [bighorninfo@fs.fed.us](mailto:bighorninfo@fs.fed.us).

### **Supervisor's Office**

Forest Supervisor Bill Bass  
[bbass@fs.fed.us](mailto:bbass@fs.fed.us)

2013 Eastside 2nd Street  
Sheridan, WY 82801  
Telephone 307.674.2600

### **Tongue Ranger District**

District Ranger Amy Ormseth  
[aormseth@fs.fed.us](mailto:aormseth@fs.fed.us)

2013 Eastside 2nd Street  
Sheridan, WY 82801  
Telephone 307.674.2600

### **Powder River Ranger District**

District Ranger Mark Booth  
[mbooth@fs.fed.us](mailto:mbooth@fs.fed.us)

1415 Fort Street  
Buffalo, WY 82834

### **Medicine Wheel / Paintrock Ranger District**

District Ranger Dave Hogen  
[dhogen@fs.fed.us](mailto:dhogen@fs.fed.us)

604 East Main\*  
Lovell, WY 82431

\*In June 2015, the Medicine Wheel / Paintrock Ranger District will relocate to 95 U.S. Highway 16/20, Greybull, WY 82426



# FASTFACTS

## General

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Forest land area               | 1,115,161 acres  |
| Land types                     | About 60 percent forested<br>About 40 percent shrub, meadow, or rock   |
| Staffing                       | 86 permanent employees<br>70 temporary employees   |
| Average annual budget          | \$8 million  |
| Elevations                     | Lowest—5,500 feet<br>Highest—Cloud Peak at 13,175 feet   |
| Special areas and designations | Cloud Peak Wilderness—189,000 acres<br>Rock Creek recommended wilderness—33,850 acres<br>Bucking Mule Falls National Recreation Trail<br>Four research natural areas—6,400 acres<br>Three scenic byways<br>Medicine Wheel/Medicine Mountain National Historic Landmark |



## Goods and services

|                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| Commercial livestock grazing | 75 active allotments on 822,337 acres<br>97 term grazing permits<br>Animal unit months permitted ~91,000<br>Animal unit months authorized ~74,200 |
|------------------------------|---|

## Resources and vegetation management

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Forest management and timber   | Timber volume sold 34,222 Ccf on 1,624 acres<br>Vegetation improved 792 acres<br>Forest regeneration 231 acres |
| Annual allowable sale quantity | Forest Plan 27,183 Ccf<br>Fiscal year 2014 34,222 Ccf<br>Program objective 18,931 Ccf                          |
| Other forest products          | 2,486 cords firewood<br>211 cords post and pole<br>1,861 Christmas tree/transplant permits                     |

## Fire and fuels management

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Staffing                                | Three engines, three hand crews (includes Black Tooth Fire Module)<br>Wyoming Interagency Hotshots  |
| Hazardous fuels reduction               | 3,882 acres   |
| Wildland fire history 1910 through 2014 | Average fires per year 16 (48 percent lightning, 52 percent human caused)<br>Average acres per year 1,190<br>Largest wildfire Bone Creek 13,450 acres |



# RECREATION

Whatever your interest, the Bighorn National Forest provides easy access to a wide range of recreation activities. Whether you're into skiing, snowmobiling, backpacking, day hikes, camping, picnicking, biking, fishing, viewing wildlife and scenery, or horseback riding, the Bighorn has something to offer.

In 2014,

- 10,710 people registered at the Medicine Wheel / Medicine Mountain National Historic Landmark
- Employees at Shell Falls Interpretive Site made 36,451 visitor contacts
- Trails, wilderness, and recreation crews completed maintenance on 271 miles of motorized and non-motorized trails
- 261 miles of roads were maintained

The Bighorn's increasing popularity also presents management challenges to address user conflicts, visitor needs, impacts to resources, and the changing technology of recreation uses.

The stark realities of the national economy mean that strong community relationships, partnerships, and collaborative work are more important than ever. Many individuals and groups work in partnership with us to make a difference in sustaining the forest's resources. We rely on these strong, collaborative relationships to help us accomplish our work.

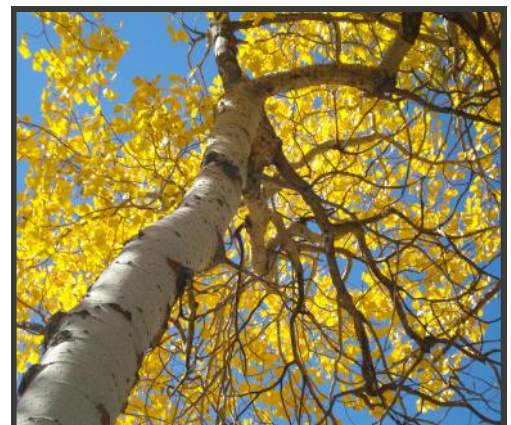
In 2014, volunteers provided over 7,800 hours of labor valued at \$159,574 on 13 recreation, heritage, and trails projects.

Our long-term partnership with Wyoming State Trails provided over \$80,000 in funding support for education and travel management enforcement.

A HistoriCorps crew performed preservation and restoration work on the Black Mountain Fire Lookout, with a partner value of over \$52,000.

## RECREATION FY14

- **34** campgrounds
- **10** picnic areas
- **1** downhill ski area
- **577** miles non-motorized trails
- **180** miles motorized trails
- **391** miles snowmobile trails
- **263** recreation residences
- **3** cross-country ski areas
- **49** outfitters/guides
- **8** lodges/resorts
- **1,433** miles roads
- **20-25** recreation events per year





# AQUATICWATERSHEDSBOTANY

National Forest System lands are the single largest source of fresh water in the United States.

The Bighorn's streams, rivers, lakes, and reservoirs provide domestic and agricultural water supplies for local communities as well as habitat for wildlife, plants, fish, amphibians, and aquatic insects.

The fisheries, aquatics, and botany group works to maintain, enhance, and restore these important aquatic ecosystems.

In 2014, the Bighorn's sensitive wetlands benefited from two partnerships that provided significant resources to eliminate sedimentation impacts and further protect these fragile systems. Further work to inventory fens (peatlands) and document rare plant locations will add to the knowledge about a new species found only at a few locations in the Bighorns.

The Swamp Creek Trail was rerouted to an abandoned logging road to alleviate erosion and sedimentation in a fen wetland. The project was funded by the Sheridan Area Water Supply Joint Powers Board and constructed by the Bighorn's road crew. A companion project is an inventory of fens being conducted by Wyoming Natural Diversity Database. This project will help us better protect and preserve sensitive wetland habitats that are often home to rare plants like the English sundew, a bug-eating plant found in abundance in the Sawmill fen.

The Bighorn National Forest provided funding to a University of Wyoming biologist who specializes in Botrychiums, also known as moonworts (seedless vascular plants). New locations of this rare plant have been elusive. This work will continue documenting the occurrences of multiple rare species of Botrychiums.



Botrychium



English sundew

## WATERFY14

- 1,400 miles of streams and rivers
- 3,950 acres of lakes and reservoirs



# RENTALPROGRAM

The Federal Lands Recreation Act provides a mechanism for the Forest Service to rent government-owned facilities to the public. Three historic facilities—two cabins and one fire lookout—are available to rent through this program.

The **Sheep Mountain Lookout** was constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps and was historically occupied as a fire lookout until the 1970s. The lookout became available to rent in June 2014. Recent improvements include a new outhouse, new mattresses, and a smoke alarm. At 9,600 feet in elevation, the panoramic views from Sheep Mountain compensate for the rustic accommodations. It offers four sturdy walls, a sound roof, no neighbors (except an occasional moose), and commanding views. The lookout is available to rent from June 15 through October 31 for \$50 per night.

The **Pole Creek Cabin** was built in the mid 1950s by the Boy Scouts as a summer retreat. The cabin is conveniently located for access to a wide variety of year-round activities. Its location along both a snowmobile trail and within the Pole Creek Cross Country Ski Area trail system make it a great winter activity destination, and in the summer and fall, visitors can find fishing, mountain biking, ATV riding, and hiking. In the spring, the nearby meadow is filled with wildflowers. The cabin sleeps four to six people in bunk beds (room for more on the floor). There's a wood stove, table, chairs, benches, and utensils. A fire ring, picnic table, and outhouse are located nearby. Pole Creek cabin became available in April 2014 and rents for \$35 per night.

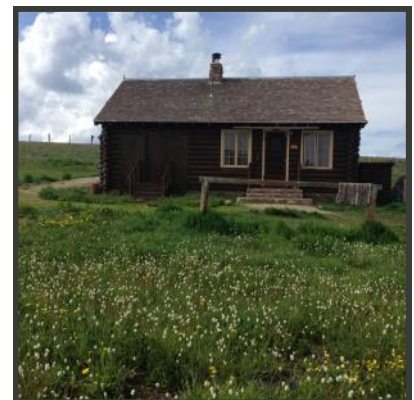
Constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s, the **Muddy Guard Cabin** was originally used as a Forest Service guard station. It represents the rustic architecture of the Forest Service during that era. Situated in a large, open meadow near Muddy Creek, the cabin's interior consists of a kitchen, two bedrooms, electric stove, wood stove, small refrigerator, couches, and a dining table and chairs. Horse corrals, a hitching post, and a new outhouse are situated close by. Muddy Guard rents for \$40 per night.



The view from Sheep Mountain



Pole Creek Cabin



Muddy Guard Cabin

## RENTALS FY14

### Sheep Mountain Lookout

Rental income \$4,950

Expenditures \$2,572

Net \$2,377

### Pole Creek Cabin

Rental income \$4,165

Expenditures \$9,651

Net -\$5,486

### Muddy Guard Cabin

Rental income \$7,920

Expenditures \$2,723

Net \$5,196

**Total income \$17,035**

**Total expenditures \$14,946**

**95 percent** of these funds will stay on the Bighorn to help defray maintenance costs and make improvements.

**Note:** Some expenditures are for one-time only improvements. We expect the rental program to generate more revenue, allowing us to add facilities to the rental program.



# MONITORING



Monitoring and evaluation are important components of implementing the 2005 Revised Forest Plan. Presented here are samples of the monitoring we performed in 2014.

## Fish

- Surveyed for the design of the Canyon Creek/Forest Service Road 25 aquatic organism passage
- Constructed new trail bridge and removed an over-widened low water crossing on Buckskin Ed Creek, improving aquatic habitat for Yellowstone cutthroat trout
- With the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, estimated fish populations in the North and South Tongue Rivers

## Invasive species

- Treated 1,100 acres

## Cloud Peak Wilderness

- 89 percent of wilderness users were hikers, with 11 percent using pack and saddle stock
- Compliance with required registration was 95 percent
- 80 percent of wilderness visitors entered from U.S. Highway 16
- 253 incident reports, warnings, and violation notices were issued

For the complete picture of monitoring on the Bighorn, the FY 2014 Monitoring and Evaluation Report is available on the web at [www.fs.usda.gov/main/bighorn/landmanagement/planning](http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/bighorn/landmanagement/planning).

## Livestock grazing

Over 20,000 acres of rangeland were improved (fences, water developments, and/or prescribed burning)

**Want to know more?** For the complete picture of monitoring on the Bighorn, the Fiscal Year 2014 Monitoring and Evaluation Report will be available on the web at [www.fs.usda.gov/main/bighorn/landmanagement/planning](http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/bighorn/landmanagement/planning).





# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS



Bighorn National Forest employees are dedicated to public service. Every year we compile a report that summarizes the year's achievements in helping people in local communities appreciate and understand the value of the national forest.

In 2014, Bighorn National Forest employees delivered conservation education and interpretation to over 69,000 people. This is a remarkable achievement for a rural forest that employs about 86 permanent and 70 temporary employees and is situated in the midst of four counties with a total population of about 58,000.

The faces of the Bighorn National Forest are ubiquitous in local communities. We are present at Earth Day and Arbor Day celebrations, 4th of July parades, open houses, YMCA programs, youth programs for students in elementary schools and colleges, and county leadership forums. Though not a Bighorn employee, Smokey Bear appears in fire prevention and safety presentations throughout the four-county area.

The Chief of the Forest Service, wrote, "Conservation begins where people live," and nowhere is that more evident than in the communities surrounding the Bighorn. Bighorn employees are committed to education about the Forest Service mission, encouraging responsible recreation and resource use, and making this national forest relevant to present and future generations.

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**Are you interested in working in the great outdoors?** The Forest Service offers a variety of job opportunities—both paid and unpaid—ranging from student and volunteer programs to full-time employment for men and women with skills in many areas. To find out more, visit the Forest Service website at [www.fs.fed.us/working-with-us/jobs](http://www.fs.fed.us/working-with-us/jobs).



*The 2014 Year in Review report was published by the Bighorn National Forest from the Supervisor's Office in Sheridan, WY.*

*The USDA is an equal opportunity employer and provider.*





## MEETNEWFACES



Thad Berrett is the new rangeland management specialist for the Powder River Ranger District in Buffalo. Thad has broad experience in range management, working for Idaho State Lands, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the Forest Service. He received a University of Idaho degree in range livestock management. Thad comes to the Bighorn National Forest from the Salmon-Challis National Forest in rural Mackay, Idaho.

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Christopher Jones came to the Bighorn in May 2014 from the Bureau of Land Management in Rawlins, where he worked as an outdoor recreation planner. Chris is the Bighorn's forest planning staff officer in the Supervisor's Office in Sheridan. In addition to many years in academia, Chris has worked in the White River National Wildlife Refuge in Arkansas and the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park in Tennessee. Chris holds post-graduate degrees in recreation and forestry.

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Amy Ormseth became the district ranger for the Tongue Ranger District earlier this year. A Nebraska native, Amy has held various positions with the Forest Service in Nebraska, Idaho, Wyoming, and most recently, on the Pike and San Isabel National Forests and Cimarron/Comanche National Grasslands in Salida, Colorado, where she served as the district ranger. Amy earned a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology.

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The new fish and wildlife program leader in the Supervisor's Office is Alex Gardiner. Alex relocated from the Bureau of Land Management Wells Field Office in the bustling gold country of Elko, Nevada. At Elko, Alex was the wildlife biologist for minerals projects and the fisheries and riparian area specialist. Most of Alex's career has been with the Forest Service working in the cold trout waters of Wyoming, but he has also served in Alaska, Idaho, and Utah. Alex received a bachelor's degree in fisheries and wildlife management from Utah State University. He said he's happy to bring his family back to the great state of Wyoming and get his feet wet in the chilly waters of the Bighorn Mountains.

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RIDE ON Wyoming was established as a model public/private partnership to address environmental and social impacts associated with recreation involving the use of motorized vehicles on Wyoming trails.

Tread Lightly! Is working with Wyoming State Trails, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Forest Service to implement this multi-faceted education, outreach, and stewardship campaign to promote responsible off-road vehicle use.

## FORESTPLANSTEERINGCOMMITTEE

Ten years after the Bighorn's Revised Forest Plan was signed, the Forest Plan Steering Committee continues to provide valuable local input to Bighorn National Forest managers on projects and issues that affect local communities.

Our sincere thanks to all the Steering Committee members for their dedication to this national forest.

Wyoming Game and Fish Department

Governor's office

Wyoming State Forestry

Washakie County Conservation District

Sheridan County Conservation District

Shoshone Conservation District

Johnson County

Washakie County

Wyoming Department of Transportation

State Historic Preservation Office

Wyoming State Trails

Lake DeSmet Conservation District

South Big Horn Conservation District

Big Horn County

Sheridan County

